

Wild Caught  
Paul Huie Oral History  
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Interviewer: MB – Matthew Barr  
Transcriber: NCC

Matthew Barr: I think part of the document, just to give you a little background, we can edit all this. I mean, that's what my main job is.

PH: Yes.

MB: Last film, I did take seven years to make. Hopefully, this one won't take quite as long to do. But it's a labor of love. I certainly don't do this for the money –

PH: Yes.

MB: – doing documentary. I do it because I want to. Basically, I'm doing a series of documentaries about working people, working towns.

PH: Yes.

MB: I feel like we don't get enough of that side of the story. We're always hearing about movie stars and all that. There's nothing wrong with that but –

PH: Yes.

MB: – more crime or bad news. But how about some positive stuff about people – your story, people who work for a living and work hard for their money?

PH: Yes.

MB: You grew up in Sneads Ferry. What was it like growing up in a small fishing town? What was that like?

PH: Well, I've watched the town grow a little bit. Hurricanes try to beat you up off and on, but it's not really that many more people moved in. Like on the outskirts, there's more houses, more northerners have come down and retired, moved in. But clamming is still good. Fishing isn't as good as it used to be, not inside. Basically, it's all about the same. It's just a few more people.

MB: Now, did you grow up in a fishing family?

PH: My father did his four years in service. He comes from Arkansas. He got out of service here over at Camp Lejeune. We've been here ever since. My mother was a farmer's daughter. My grandfather was from around here. So, he stayed here, born and raised on a river. I've been ever since.

MB: So, after your father got in the Marines, did he –

PH: He stayed here. He didn't go back to Arkansas, where he –

MB: Did he get into fishing himself?

PH: Yes. He had a seafood house, Paul Huie Seafood, where he bought and sold oysters, clams, shrimp. Plus, he hauled a lot of clams up north to Baltimore, Maryland, and around. He bought a lot of fish where he ran here and yonder . He had a couple of fish trucks. So –

MB: So, you really grew up on the water.

PH: Grew up on the water in the water. [laughter] Yes.

MB: So, tell me about some of your earliest experiences in fishing. How old were you when you really started to really get into it?

PH: I started clamming about 6 years old, just started out with my mother and father. I'd go with them in the summertime, clamming down on Cedar Point. But when I started really making my money, I was probably 15, 16 when I went wide open at it for a living. When I graduated, I kept right on it. That's what I've been doing ever since. But I've always messed around in the river, making money. It's just been it. I tried all the jobs, worked on the hill, hanging – doing shingles and roof work and all that and little carpentering. But I always like fishing better. It seemed like you always go back to it.

MB: So, what is it about it that takes you back?

PH: You're your own boss. You work as hard as you want to. The harder you work, the more money you'll make. You're independent. You do what you want. You're your own boss. That's what I like.

MB: Tell me about some of the different types of fishing you've done.

PH: Oh, I've had crab. I used to have hundreds of crab pots, a bull rake, long handle – what you call long raking – scallop, dug for scallops. I had a thirty-four-foot boat one time for shrimping. I drag shrimp trawls. I oystered, got oyster tongs. Done a little bit of all of it. I mean, it's seasonal. You move from one thing to the next. Clamming, then you have shrimping, then you have oystering for the winter. Yes. Then it starts all over again the next year.

MB: So, there's something you can do.

PH: There's always something you can do to make some money to pay your bills until we have hurricanes or a lot of rain when they close everything. Then nobody gets to work. State shuts it down.

MB: Well, now, right now, you're doing clamming.

PH: Clamming, yes.

MB: So, talk a little bit about how you got into that. What's up with that? How do you actually do it so far?

PH: You just jump overboard. You go out there, and you have your five-pick basket with a ring, plenty of socks so you don't cut your feet, if you foot clam now. Now, if you hand clam, you got your rubber gloves that you wear, latex, real thin, so you can sense it. You can feel them. Same way with your feet. You just float around, pick them up. If you're lucky, it grows on you. After you do it for a while, you get used to it. You flip the clams right up, pick them up, throw them in the basket, work along all day.

MB: So, what do you do for lunch? [laughter]

PH: Oh, we might grab a drink. We hold every stop meeting lunch, just maybe a nab a drink when we go to the boat to dump a basket, and then we go right back. I mean, supper is the main meal [laughter] in the evening.

MB: Well, now how deep is the water there?

PH: Probably four or five-foot. From three feet to five feet, five-and-a-half feet. Yes.

MB: How do you know where to go for the clam?

PH: Because we go there every day, day after day [laughter] after day, year after year, twenty-something years in the bay. Thirty-something years around there, yes. I've clammed at the bay there, shoot – probably close to forty years I worked in that bay. 6, 7 years old, I can remember going around there with my dad when I was 6, 7 years old, clamming, all natural rocks in there. Probably forty years long, yes. That's a long time.

MB: So, you got forty years' experience in –

PH: Oh, yes. Yes.

MB: – where they are and –

PH: Yes, the rocks. That's the main thing, you got to find the rocks. Most of the clams grow in the rocks. They don't move around like fish or nothing. But if you go to some areas with a lot of mud, you won't do as good. You just have to check out the rock.

MB: Well, how big are these rocks?

PH: Some of them probably fifty by one hundred feet. You know what I'm saying? The rocks can be that long, or they can be two hundred feet by one hundred feet. It's just like natural rocks. It's mud gravels what it really is. It's crushed oyster shells mixed with the mud. It seems like the clams catch better in that than just out on the flat mud. They got something to cling on to while they grow.

MB: So, you feel for the clams with your feet?

PH: Feel for them with your feet. They feel like little golf balls. Sometimes they literally feel

like marbles and golf balls, yes. The big ones kind of more feels like – I don't know what to say – baseball, big – like stepping on a baseball outside, just wallowing around. That's what they feel when you hit them in the mud.

MB: Then you bring it up with your feet?

PH: [affirmative] I slide it on one foot on the other foot and pick it straight up. You take it off your foot and put it in a basket. Yes.

MB: So, how many can you get in a day?

PH: Oh, in a day, well, being the summer, it's about – and the place has been hit pretty hard, about a thousand a day now, five bags, 1,250. It varies from a thousand. But at the beginning of the summer, it can be up to two thousand a day for a while, eight bags sometimes. Then the openings like they have at Cool Creek, you can catch them eight bags a day down there for about a week and then out to where you just leave. Yes, that was –

MB: That was an amazing number of clams.

PH: That's a lot of clams. A couple thousand a day, that's eight bags. Some of the long rakers do that – had been doing it, like long raking. That's where it's at. (Barry Brown?), he's real good at it too.

MB: So, how many people are full-time clammers or who are really into it like you are?

PH: I imagine there's probably twenty or thirty around here who does it, all together, probably twenty, thirty people, right here in Sneads Ferry.

MB: So, you get to the clams, and you have the boat. Then at the end of the day, you go and –

PH: At the end of the day, we bring them to a truck, load them up. We take them to Grants, unload them, load them in there for him. Sometimes, we dump them in the vat to help him out. Then he writes us up the trip ticket, pays us, and we're on our way. This is one of my clammers. He's the young – the paramedic.

MB: Oh, I see. So, you detach the clam with one foot, and you pop it on your other foot and just basically lift your –

PH: Pick it up and put it in the basket.

MB: Well, I don't know if I can do that. I'm not limber enough to do that.

PH: Well, in that water, you float. It's amazing how light you are. It's like flexible. You float right around. It's not hard at all. You hold a lot lighter in the water. Now, on land, doing it all day and not being in water can be hard. But floating is just like ballet. I mean, it's unbelievable. Yes.

MB: But now, does it bother you to be in the water all day long?

PH: Yes. If you don't have a hat on to keep the sun off of you, it makes you feel weak. That sun kind of drains you.

MB: Yes.

PH: That's why they make hats for and sunglasses. Yes, we wear them sometimes.

MB: But it doesn't bother you being in the water hours and just –

PH: No, no. Being in the water has never bothered me, never. A lot of soaking. I mean, I've probably spent more time in the water [laughter] than a lot of people. Yes. So, every summer for that many – for as old as I am, at least six hours a day, some days longer – six, eight hours – seems like your skin would dry out. But –

MB: Looks just fine.

PH: Yes.

MB: All right. So, in other words, have you ever done the bull raking you're talking about?

PH: I have done the bull raking. But I can't bull rake no more. I had a heart attack here four months ago. Nothing real heavy. I can't do nothing heavy, not for a while.

MB: Wow, that's a serious event.

PH: Yes. Yes.

MB: Did it happen on land or –

PH: Yes.

MB: That's good.

PH: Yes. Good thing I wasn't clamming. [laughter] I've been in the hospital up there for four days. They medivaced me. I had a heart attack in Jacksonville. They medivaced me to Duke. I stayed there nine days in Duke. Four days I was what they called unconscious, where that thing pumps for you – heart pump and all that. Yes. But other than that, I feel pretty good. That's four months ago.

MB: Wow. So, everything's okay?

PH: No. After you have one then, you feel weak. I can tell that I'm not backup to nowhere near 100 percent because it damaged 50 percent from the heart attack itself. Anything can last an

hour or longer, having a heart attack. It doesn't just happen that quick. It goes on and on and on until you have it or they stop it. Once you start having it, that's rough. Yes. It's how I blacked out. When I had it, I passed right out, went right on out. I was in the emergency room or on the table when a doctor was working on me, giving me the shot for the blockbuster and everything else that he did. That didn't stop it. It proceeded right on. When I woke up again, it was four days later. I was in (Chap Duke?), four days sleeping [laughter] without knowing where I was at or what was going on, just sore. The fifth day, I was real sore because they went in and did the triple bypass. Four days later, I was back out walking. It's amazing. They can fix you.

MB: It is amazing to go through such a critical situation. I mean, I've never had a heart attack. I almost drowned in a riptide last summer right here.

PH: Man, I bet that was scary.

MB: I thought that was the end.

PH: Somebody –

MB: A Marine was swimming nearby.

PH: He got you?

MB: Yes. He was boogie boarding up the way, [inaudible] about 7:30 p.m. at night, July 3rd in '99. I made a mistake going out by myself.

PH: Good God.

MB: After a while, this riptide started pulling me out of the sea.

PH: Yes.

MB: I kept fighting it. I started panicking in the water. I was rushed over my head.

PH: Yes.

MB: I started to go down. I waved. These guys are way up there, Marine and his buddy, and they saw me. They finally came over.

PH: They came and got you. [inaudible]

MB: The three of us had a hard time making it back at an angle to the shore.

PH: Yes. You have to swim with it, yes.

MB: We just barely made it.

PH: Yes.

MB: They saved about four people that weekend.

PH: Yes.

MB: I want to tell you, I wrote it all down that night, and I started crying.

PH: Yes.

MB: That thing almost got me. Makes you –

PH: You can never swim right against that tide. That's what they always say. If you get caught into it, the undertow takes you offshore. You swim in an angle and go with it. Then you can angle yourself right into the beach. But if you're trying to swim straight in or against it, you're just tiring yourself out, yes.

MB: They said three people of that in the last couple days.

PH: Yes. Right over here at Atlantic Beach, I think.

MB: Yes.

PH: Yes, sure did. It says a lot of young swimmers don't really know if the undertow is bad or whatever. That's why I've always been real strict with my boys growing up when they go to the beach over there. I never let them go swimming way off this and that. I kept pretty close range on them, and they're still here.

MB: How many boys do you have, speaking about your boys?

PH: Three sons. Yes, I got three sons.

MB: Now –

PH: 27, one of them is a plumber, (Shannon?). (Christopher?), 21, he's a paramedic. Then (Jason?), 18, he wants to go on to be an oceanographer. He's going to start this fall at college. He wants to be, yes.

MB: Where is he going to go to school?

PH: UNCW, I think.

MB: Big oceanography program there.

PH: Yes.



MB: Well, that's good. That's good.

PH: Yes.

MB: Keep them all in the UNC systems. We like that. [laughter]

PH: [laughter] Oh, yes.

MB: Yes. Proud to be part of that system.

PH: Yes.

MB: It's one of the great university systems. Well, now do your sons work with you in the clamming?

PH: They have all their life until they've graduated. Christopher, like I said, he's going to move on this year. He's going to Greensburg. He went to oyster with me. He oystered with me last year. Jason, he was in school. Now, my oldest one, he plumbs. He's a plumber. He works in Jacksonville. But he goes with me, like on Fridays and Saturdays. All their days off, they go with me to work to make extra money. But Jason, like I said, he'll be in college this winter. I'll be oystering by myself. I'll be back doing it. Christopher, he'll be gone, like everybody be going their separate ways in college. Now, he might clam with me some next year. I'm not sure. I don't know. But Chris, he won't be back, my oldest – my middle one. He'll be a paramedic up there in Greensboro.

MB: That's going to be tough not having them around.

PH: I'll just have to work around somebody. I got cousins out there, (Joy?) and (Scott?) and a bunch of them. (Stevie?), different ones that I'll see every day. So, I'll be pretty safe.

MB: Do you have a lot of family around here?

PH: Well, my mother and father are gone. I got three sisters, (Janie?), (Tammy?), and (Didi?) and a couple brother-in-law's. My Aunt [inaudible 00:19:33] on my daddy's side, not a lot of family. I don't have a lot of family.

MB: What was it like growing up in this town?

PH: It was fun. It's pretty easy-going, not a whole lot of trouble growing up. We all had a good time, just had a good childhood. We've done about what we wanted growing up. You could do about anything, not a lot of law, which I am not talking about doing nothing illegal. But it was just fun. It was pretty much your own boss all your life. I mean, as long as you do what mom and daddy said, you get the [laughter] run of the road.

MB: Has Sneads Ferry changed much over time?

PH: It's not really changed all that much. It's just, like I said, a few more people, more houses, but the water is still about the same. It's weekenders. A lot of weekenders, more boat and activity out there, but it's not really changed all that much. Not to me, it's not. I mean, it's just modified. I mean –

MB: So, the clamming will go on through when now? How much longer?

PH: Until it gets cold. I'll be clamming overboard, probably the 1st of October. Yes, all September. I'll clam in September. Then October, I'll probably start shrimping, yes. Waters are going to be cooling off good in October. I mean, September, then October. Yes, September. Probably in the middle of September, I'll quit. That's when the big, (red?) mollusks start showing up.

MB: So, you'll go for that?

PH: I won't go for that, but a bunch of the boys around will be. They'll be fishing rod and looking for them. Yes. They'll come down from one, chase down that way for more head this way in the canal back at the beach here.

MB: I see.

PH: Well – excuse me. Go ahead.

MB: No, no. So, you really like being your own boss. I mean, I think that's a big part of the story.

PH: Oh, yes.

MB: There's a sense of freedom out being on the water.

PH: There's a sense of freedom. You got that right. I mean, it's – yes.

MB: Going back to the clams, in other words, once you collect the clams for the day, then what happens?

PH: Your day's work is done. Once you collect them, bring them, and sell them. If you have something else you want to do, you do it, like work on your boat. I work on a boat. If you wanted to have another job, you could go out and do that too. But that's enough for me, clamming and shrimping.

MB: Pretty hard work, isn't it?

PH: At times, yes. Long raking is a lot harder than foot clamming, which I got my boys to relieve me of all the heavy lifting and stuff. They do that for me. So, it was pretty hard work, yes, especially in long raking. Because you had to pick that rake up so many times a day, and you figure for 50- to 75 -pound every time you drag it up, shake it out, and dump it. That's a

whole lot harder than overboard clamming, raking. Oystering, it isn't too hard to me because you're just dropping them down, making grabs. That'd be amazing for you to see how that's done, go out oystering. But see, that's in the wintertime. They got us on a basis there, a limit of five bushels a day. That's basically \$125 a day. We can make that in half a day, or maybe a little longer. Then we come and sell them to the fish house.

MB: So, is the money pretty good?

PH: The money is pretty good, yes. You can make a living, live halfway decent. Yes.

MB: So, you're really pretty much working year-round then.

PH: Yes. I have been doing it year-round. Now, I don't know about this winter, since I had this heart attack for us pumping the tongs. I don't know if I will be able to do that or not. Clamming, like I said, that isn't real hard, not floating around catching him. But bull raking is hard. Pumping the tongs is more a little stringent work. I don't know if I can hold up to the hours to do it. That's going to have to be something I'm just going to have to try here in a few months.

MB: See how it goes.

PH: See how it goes. If I got to hurt myself, I am not going to do it because I was told not to do heavy lifting.

MB: I guess it depends on what they mean by heavy lifting.

PH: Yes. He never gave me really no weight other than a glass of water or this or that for months. So, I was supposed to pick nothing up until everything healed. Like I said, it'd be a full month. It's pretty much healed, but you can still feel it sore coughing [laughter] really.

MB: The actual heart attack went on for an hour?

PH: About an hour.

MB: Yes.

PH: You feel it coming on.

MB: So, what does it feel like?

PH: A heart attack feel – you start hurting right in the center of the chest. It feels like pressure is coming on you, like your heart is being squeezed. Then your arms, one of them will go tingling and go numb. Both of them will go numb. Then you'll start hurting all the way across your chest. It feels like your heart has been put in a vice. The pain doesn't go away. It just slowly intensifies until your balls are sweating because your thumb will pop off your head. Because you'll be in so much pain, you just – it doesn't go away. It just gets worse and worse until you fall out. When you pass out, you feel no more pain until you wake up.

MB: Wow.

PH: Yes.

MB: Well, I'm glad that everything's looking good. But it's good that we live in a state where there's some major medical centers too.

PH: Oh, yes.

MB: – like Duke and Chapel Hill and all that.

PH: Oh, yes, better believe I like Duke and Chapel Hill. [laughter] They saved my life up there, yes.

MB: Yes. You don't forget that.

PH: No. It was some good doctors.

MB: Very good.

PH: It was amazing. When I was in there and they were doing lung transplants and this and that, there was this little girl. They took a third of one of her mama's lungs out and a third of one of her father's lungs out and put it in her over in Duke. It took – so, so she was doing real good.

MB: They kind of needed a lung for her then.

PH: It was amazing, yes.

MB: Yes. That's unbelievable.

PH: She was young.

MB: Well, let me ask you a few other questions. What do you think in terms of the future of commercial fishing just in general, shrimping? Because I've been talking to a lot of fishermen and some people feel optimistic, some people don't feel so. Are there any rules or regulations, for example, about how many clams you can catch or anything? Are there limits on that stuff or –

PH: No. There's no limits on the clams as far as foot clamming. They got twenty-five bags a day on the clam dredges. They get to do that every other year. Other than that, everything's fine. We've got so many laws that they don't know what to do with them all. They make force. It's almost where they can come take you anytime they want to. When you leave to go to work, if you got anything on a boat, they can write you a ticket. I mean if they wanted to. Basically, the way the law is, law is beyond laws. You don't never know if you're doing something wrong or not because they've been thrown in there. But other than that, I guess shrimping will hold up

good. They keep about everything closed certain times out, but – yes, I kind of like it the way it is. I wish we didn't have put them turtles excluders. I don't like that. But it'd be saving the turtles. We need the sea turtles certain times a year and leave them in the river when it gets cold. You watch shrimp that's called cold-water shrimp. When it starts getting cold, they go offshore. They go somewhere where it's warm. We had to keep on pulling them things inside, where the big boats don't have to pull them outside. It's like they say, "When all the turtles are running ashore, they're inland, and there are no turtles nowhere." When one of them things get stopped up, we'll lose our catch, just like dragging for nothing. That's the only thing I don't like about it. We've had to pull them things over the years.

MB: Do you think the younger generation will keep going in the footsteps of your generation of fishermen?

PH: No, no, no. I'm one of the last because mine's not going to do it, not full time, no. So, they're going to do something else. It's going to be like a part-time basis for them, just to fall back to go out there to, yes, clam a little bit, maybe catch some shrimp to eat. Not mine, no.

MB: Does that make you feel sad in a way?

PH: No, not really. Because the way everything is, I mean, it's not bad out there. Being a commercial fisherman, you got to love it. You got to want to do it. You just got to enjoy it. I mean, everybody's not cut out to be one. I mean, some people just tried it and said, "Well, that's too hard work. We like the hill better." They like the water. All my sons like the water. It's good money. But they also like being on the hill, working job like that. I'm glad Chris is a paramedic. He's helping save lives. He can be a doctor. But he'll always come back to the water to visit, maybe go do a little clamming on a weekend or something, probably even if he does become a doctor because it's in his blood. [laughter] All of them, yes.

MB: Well, what were we talking about? We were talking about fishing as a way of life. Now, I mean –

PH: Yes.

MB: Like I told you, I don't know a diddly-squat about fish. I'm the first to admit it. But I think what I've tried to do is show a sense of a town, a way of life, traditions, and a generational aspect. I was talking with Jody Davis –

PH: Yes.

MB: – who runs a fish house out there. His brothers were both shrimpers.

PH: Right.

MB: They got quite a little operation out there, all the boats and everything. Buddy Davis, that guy has got some wisdom there –

PH: Yes.

MB: – in terms of experience and all that.

PH: Yes.

MB: I guess who's going to carry on the traditions? I mean, I think it's great that sons have their careers.

PH: Yes.

MB: But all I'm saying is, what do you think it? I mean, what you do, what Johnny Wayne does, a whole lot of other people requires a tremendous amount of – you have a huge amount of experience. Because after forty years, there's no way you can learn that in a book where to do it, how to do it.

PH: Yes.

MB: In other words, it's the kind of thing that, in a way, can only be carried on through people. It goes again in the blood, I guess, this whole thing.

PH: Yes. You got to love to want to do it. It seems like the generation now, they want to go and do something else. Like I said, where the laws are getting all that, they got more laws that they don't know what to do with. It's just getting worse and worse as far as they go, which I'm kind of glad to see my boys gone with a good career because you never know what's going to happen out there. The law will be like – where is it at – Florida where they banned fishing. They could close everything on the inside, just one day, stop us all. It may come to that. I hope not, but you never know.

MB: So, what you're saying it's not necessarily looking too good for the – it might not look too good in terms of all these rules and regulations in the future.

PH: Yes, for the future, way on down. They are not going to do it within five, ten years, I don't think. But on down the line, it's probably coming, yes.

MB: So, who's going to fish then?

PH: I guess they're going to import it or [laughter] whatever. They probably won't ever be stopped back in the ocean. That's just like there for years. Anybody can get the license that want to over and catch groupers, black fish, and this and that. Then it's like the government banned all that, and only so many licenses give out now because everything was getting caught up off of there. A lot of traps are being lost. But you never know. They might condemn everything around. They got a lot of areas closed in places where they say is polluted. You can't go there and work no more. So, it's not doing the commercial fishermen no good. But I don't know. I won't be in it until the end. I mean, it's not going to be gone as long as I'm here, I'm sure of that. But like my younger's young'uns, it wouldn't be looking good for them, not in the river.

MB: So, you might be the last generation, really.

PH: Yes. Or some of the other fishermen is not, like the Davis', because they got grandsons too. They got little young'uns. Them boys might jump on there [inaudible]. They might go on to be shrimpers. Because it is a good living in a bigger business like that with the big boats where you work in the ocean. Yes.

MB: I mean, do you have to worry about some crazy fool? What about the gators? Let's talk about the gators.

PH: Oh, the gators don't bother you, I mean, if you don't bother them. They're just curious. They come up to you sometimes to check you out, then they swim off. A lot of people are scared of them getting in the boats, but –

MB: Oh, you mean some of the clammers get on the boat.

PH: Yes, some of the clammers. But there's not that many gators around here. I mean, Traps Bay, like I said, over there, two or three that comes out. You had to kind of watch them in the hottest part of the summer when they got their nest. If it's an old mama gator and she's got little ones, then you have to watch her. But other than that, if you don't see the little ones around, you don't have to worry about them. You all might get that one down at (Junior's?) on film. I used to feed him down there. He's got about a fourteen-footer, probably, comes up to the dock. Have you all seen him yet?

MB: We've seen the smaller one.

PH: No. There was a great old big one. Because I've slapped him over here with fish before feeding. [laughter] He's kind of wild.

MB: He's a big one.

PH: He's a big one. But if he was out there in the bay and you were overboard clamming, they don't get that close to you. He stays a pretty good distance away from you. If he starts towards of you, he sinks down, probably goes right down where he's at, and just stays there. [laughter]

MB: That's when they get a little nervous, thinking that maybe they're right below the surface.

PH: Yes. He goes –

MB: Like [inaudible] down, yes.

PH: He goes to the bottom, yes. He's probably just as scared of us as we are him. Yes.

MB: We hope so.

PH: Yes.

MB: So, how close will they get when they're checking you out?

PH: Probably twenty feet from you, something like that – twenty, thirty feet, yes. They get pretty close at times.

MB: Talk about some of the rough weather situations you've been in.

PH: We've been off grid for fishing to come up with hard northeastern. We had to come in. But up north there, we were cutting scallops, what you call shells – not shell stocking but cutting. A nine-man crew on the boat. You're working six hours on six off around the clock. You stay up probably ten, fifteen days until you get a good quota of cut scallops. Our shack money doing that was like Maine lobsters, the big, clawed lobsters, not like the Florida lobsters. Then what they called the all-mouth, big old monkfish, we saved them. The scallops were a great big scallop, about the size of 50-cent pieces. That was fun. It was good money working up there.

MB: So, you'd rather have a scallop boat –

PH: Yes, nine, ten days trips. Yes.

MB: Have you gotten caught in a storm?

PH: Yes. We got caught on one storm one time.

MB: So, talk about what that was like.

PH: This one, well, it was big seas breaking across the bow. The boat was about ninety-foot long, had a big old Caterpillar engine in it. But it was just rough two or three days. We got caught in a storm. We had to go in Cape May, New Jersey, because a boy got hurt on there. The storm blown over, we went back to work. It's just one of them things you deal with being a fisher fishing.

MB: But fishing can be dangerous.

PH: Yes. It can be dangerous, yes. You have to watch it when you setting nets over this and that and the cables, the winch. Some fishermen gets caught on winches, it ruins them, messes them up for life. A lot of things can happen. You fall overboard, get dragged overboard in the nets. My cousin got dragged over one time when I was up – when he's been fly fishing, about 90 fathoms of water. We pushed the net over. The net was probably 60, 70 yards long, just the net. It's like a big, giant shrimp trawls kind of like. When we pushed the net over, the whip line caught his leg, snatched him off, and the big steel doors dogged off real good. You had to screw tight to hold him up. When that net comes tight, the whip line smacks him off the back of the boat. The net started setting out, and it took him right on under. I went in there and turned in back in gear, jacked the winch up, the doors up, and threw him a line and got him back on the stern. But he was cold and wet. He thought he was gone. It took him right on under. Stuff like



that can happen.

MB: Just like that.

PH: Just like that. You hear it one minute. The next minute, you could have been four hundred feet deep. If I had to dogged it off, the winch and gear and start it, you had to know what you're doing. Anything can happen, just be careful.

MB: It's like a scene in a movie.

PH: Yes. He scared us off that day. [laughter] He was the captain. I was just a deckhand. Yes, like a scene in a movie. Yes.

MB: So, somebody becomes a captain by just their –

PH: Just knowing how to read LORAN, radar, read the charts, know where to go drag. Basically, experience working with other captains, stay spending time in the wheelhouse, learning what's going on, getting the knowledge. But if you like something like that, just setting up the boat, somebody's got to be the cap. I'm just going to be on the deck myself doing the work because you stay busy. It's fun. Then driving a boat is fun too. Of course, I do that too. [laughter]. I can be a captain or a deckhand. It don't matter. So, it's good to have the experience to know how to do it if you have to. You never know in situations when it come up what you got to do. If I was offshore and my buddy was fishing and he had a heart attack or something, somebody had to bring the boat in. You need a captain. Even the deckhands, they need to know too how to run the boat and get back to shore.

MB: How to control the boat.

PH: How to control the boat, yes.

MB: Well, it's complicated, all this stuff.

PH: Yes. It all falls in with somebody working with you. You, more or less, teach them too. That's like on the boat with Davis's boys. If you really want to learn how to shrimp and they thought something of you, the boys that worked with him, they would teach him the bottom. Because just anybody and everybody can't go back there and drag because you have a lot of rocks in places. You got to know what's going on. You got to know how to read everything. Yes.

MB: Of course, you can't just be [inaudible].

PH: Anybody just can't be a captain or has years of experience and working hard.

MB: Well, I think we got a lot of stuff here. Is there anything else that you'd want to add to what we've been talking about?

PH: I don't know.

MB: We got the generational aspect.

PH: Yes.

MB: There's a lot to it. I mean, I talked with people like Mack Liverman about tides, and he started going –

PH: Yes. You have –

MB: Brother, I have no idea what you're talking about.

PH: So, you have your high tides, your low tide. At night, on your falling tide when the shrimp gets up in the water and leaves, that's where the channel netters come in. That's a bunch of young guys that have not got nothing else better to do, just sit out at night and just dump the money in the boat because it's easy work. I let them sleep during the day. [laughter] It's one of them things. You have your draggers – that's harder – putting time in.

MB: Kind of like running a tractor back and forth.

PH: Yes.

MB: I watched Mack Liverman.

PH: Yes.

MB: He knows a lot of stuff.

PH: Yes. Mack, he's good. The Davis boy is good too, yes. You have Buddy, Mack, (Will Jones?), John Norris, Ray Liverman, the Millis' over there, Timmy Millis, over that Tim Millis' fish house, all them boys is good. You have Raeford Millis. He got a big, nice boat. He's a good shrimper. They all know the back of that beach real good. They started out when they were young. They learned all that stuff for dragging. They just went on up that way.

MB: Buddy was talking was talking how you and I should clear along the rocks out.

PH: Oh, yes. They get out there after a hurricane or storm or something other. It blows them in. Even when they first started making that new bottom, they would have to go drag, use a depth recorder, mark not-so-bad places, and they will take slab rock. They would catch it on the bottom. Everybody would be dragging or tearing up nets. They get a place cleared out to drag, and there was a new (torn ground?). So –

MB: So, they would create the torn ground.

PH: Some of the bottom, they did.

MB: Dude, how are they clearing the rock down?

PH: Drag it up with a net, bring it to the heel on the boat.

Male Speaker: But it's not bad for the nets to –

PH: Oh, yes. It turned nets all to pieces at times.

MB: So, they would have to –

PH: There's been many of dollars spent on shrimp trawls that's bent to work by rocks back at that beach, (bulks?) of money. It's like there's a few captains that knows a little bit more than the other captains about the drag in the same bottoms that they drag. Some can fudge a little bit further, get closer to the big rocks and ledges, and catch more shrimp because it seems like you have shrimps just hugged right up next to the rocks. The ones who can get his door to hitting them rocks, skimming them, he'll do better. It's just like somebody's always better than somebody else, I mean, at what they do. You have your fair, good, then the best.

MB: But if there's a –

PH: They're not a better person. They know the job a little better. He can shrimp a little bit better because he's been doing it longer. He's paid more attention. He used to work more nets. He's got everything wrote down [laughter]. He's got it in there close. He isn't going to reveal everything to all the other fishermen of what he's had to pay the price to get there.

MB: So, they can cut a little bit better.

PH: They can cut a little bit better. If he makes that drag first, he's going to get a lot of cream of the crop. Yes.

MB: That's interesting. So, they will actually clear the rocks out –

PH: Yes.

MB: – and create channels essentially.

PH: Yes. They have done that back at the beach, sure have.

MS: It's also interesting. They're all kind of friends, but they all kind of keep their secrets.

PH: Oh, yes.

MB: There's a little competition.

PH: Oh, yes.

MB: They're all talking on the radio with each other.

PH: Oh, yes.

MB: They all have this point of conversation or something.

PH: Oh, and Mack loves the radio. But let me –

MB: He can run a talk show, that guy.

PH: They don't always tell each other the truth. I'll be honest with you about that.

MB: [laughter] There might be a little disinformation.

PH: So, you don't get right here and start dragging, getting five hundred pounds of shrimp one drag, and get on the radio [laughter] if somebody calls you. You hardly ever hear him call each other and ask them what they had. Because if they hear real good [laughter], he isn't going to say, "Well, I had five boxes from my last drag." If he said that, the whole fleet would move in on him. That next drag would get to nothing the next one.

MB: So, it's interesting. They all follow each other out.

PH: Yes.

MB: They knows that they're [inaudible].

PH: If anybody ever gets in any trouble, the fishermen stick together. They will stop what they were doing, and they would be there. No matter what they would be catching, money wouldn't be nothing, not to help somebody out. When everybody's doing good, nobody's in – no distress or they're just out there dragging, everybody has their little areas that they go to and try because you have so much bottom that you can drag in. Like want to go this way, and you'll say, "Well, I had a pretty good try, fifteen." I had a basket at home. The other one, he might be down, and he said, "Well, I had a box." That's pretty much. When there's three or four boats working out of one port, they have not only one radio on there. There are always [laughter] two or three radios on the boat. If you want somebody to know something, you pick up, say, your phone, you call him up, say, "Hey, that last one was a dandy. You need to be here." He'll all be 20 miles down the beach. There're ways of talking to get whoever you want to come on. It's like buddies. Sounds a little closer than others. But everybody gets along. Yes.

MB: So, you all go out and they all kind of that, "Well –"

PH: Yes.

MB: "– I am not going to go here. I am going to go there."

PH: I'm going to go there. They have so much bottom that they can drag all day, different areas that they check. Everybody don't just go to one area. You got 15, 20 places that you tow. There aren't all that many boats here in Sneads Ferry. They got a lot of tow bottom from top over down here in Surf City slap back right on pass Atlantic Beach, different areas you can drag in. So, the boats, some will go this way that morning, some will go this way. If there's a couple dragging in one place that one boat, he'll say, "Well, I'll go on down to the new ground and try it." Because generally, who's dragging, it'll tell him if he's doing anything on his tries. So, I'm going to go ahead and try the mud hole. That boat goes on down there. A lot of times, they'll tell if they're doing real good or if the guys has already set out dragging at the other place because he's going to give him a good tow in there.

MB: So, they all kind of follow each other and try to go their own way.

PH: Yes.

MB: I guess it depends on the weather since clear weather is not necessarily good or bad weather. It can be better or –

PH: See, there you go. Again, some are a little saltier than others. Some has got the bigger boats. But the steel haulers, they can go work when it's a little rougher than some of the other boats can go in. Our bars got a lot to do with it too, getting in the ground, getting out on the tide. When it gets real rough, the swells will pick you up and slam them down. They can lose their boats. That's a lot of money. You're looking at a lot of money there. If they lose the boats, they get on the bar.

MB: It's tricky getting in and out.

PH: Yes. You got to know what you're doing. Yes. You got to know how to get in and out. You might know it all on the outside [laughter], but you got to get out there to be able to do it. Then you got to get back in. So, it's a risk going and coming.

MB: Every time.

PH: Every time, it's a risk on that bar. It's just a chance. But it's a good chance if it isn't rough. You could get around if it's calm. You wouldn't tow your boat up. But if it was rough and you could get a ground, you could lose everything.

MB: So, you have to be a bit of a gamble.

PH: You got to have a bit of a gamble, yes. [laughter] Yes.

MB: All right.

MS: Well, we weren't rolling tape when asked that other question.

MB: What was the question?

MS: Well, one, I was wondering if you ever had problems with boats. Two, are there ever – we saw porpoises in there. (They've got up on there?).

PH: No.

MS: But we saw a lot of sharks behind the shrimp boats. They're –

PH: Oh, yes. You don't follow the board at night, not shrimping. You could get eaten. Same sharks feed at night, mainly. Now, when I worked in Florida down there, out in Marathon Key West, I shrimped down there one year working on different big boats, like I said, traveling around. At night, you shovel that jumbo boats. In the daytime down there, you anchor up and sleep, and you shrimp at night in Key West. The sharks get real thick back in a boat. All you see is fifty or a hundred fins cutting back and forth. You show your junk overboard after you tow your crabs and little fish, and they're just in a feeding frenzy. They eat as quick as it hits the water. There's a shark for everything you threw over. If you fell off that boat, you will be all over with that night. Yes, they will hit you. It'd be all over with. Nobody won't find you. They'll eat you good. So, that's dangerous too, working at night, especially down there in the warm water because there's a lot of sharks. I have seen them real thick back in the beach here, sharks at times. But I never know about it following overboard. But I'm sure if you did, if you fell over, you could –

MB: Become dead.

PH: – there's a very good chance of it. That's why [laughter] everybody's always careful when you're dragging at night. Yes.

MB: What was the other question, (Andy?)?

MS: Well, you never stay in the shallow water when you're clamming.

PH: What, sharks? Every once in a while, you see one come in, like a hammerhead. I've seen hammerheads come in there, seven, eight footers, rolled his eyeball up and looked all around at times [laughter], yes. But not all the time. It's very rare. You see them sometimes.

MB: What do you do?

MS: Oh, yes.

PH: I'll get out of the water. If I see a shark come close to the boat, I get out of the water. I'll run over to my boat and scare them off. Yes, I've done that.

MB: That's a scary image out there. They're rolling eyeballs.

PH: Yes. I've seen them do that. I've seen them big hammerheads come in. You go out. You know how you went out to the ocean? Okay. When you come straight out the cut that Cedar

Point, once you get inland there, that big bay all over in there is called Traps Bay and Cedar Point. I've seen him in there. People flying nets in there at night, they've called it hammerheads too. It seemed there's like a straight shot for them hammerhead to go through them sloughs to go back in there and feed on mullets and flounder and just get eaten back in here, I reckon.

MB: That must be interesting to see, those eyeballs rolling.

PH: It is. I've seen them turn a head, get a ground right there on Cedar Point. I'd be clamming. I get running out of the water because they would come in the slough, and he would come right up in shallow water and his fin would be sticking out. He like turned his head and his eye. He was just neat-looking. It was time for me to get out and be splashing, beating, trying to run him off the sandbar there. He ran us up on sandbar (at slough?). He was just curious because he thought that was fish, probably in that mud streak we were leaving while we were working. So, that's why we went in that mud streak right on that fit. Because a lot of times, when fish gets real thick on the bottom, it'll leave a mud streak. Certain times of the year, when thousands of boxes of spots brought the sand back at the beach. So many fish is just a bowl, and they're traveling. I've seen 50, 60 boxes, 5-, 6,000-pound one run. They go in the big, pretty yellow spots when we had them mud [inaudible], same difference.

MS: Now, do you ever encounter stuff on the bottom, like rusty traps or bottles or whatever?

PH: No, not really.

MB: So, it's pretty clean bottom there?

PH: Yes, yes.

MB: That's new.

PH: It's pretty clean bottom in the river. It flushes it out. Sometimes it's not really that many crab pots. (Johnny, he keeps all his stuff cleaned up. When he's still crabbing, he gets it out. Occasionally, every once in a while, somebody will run over a buoy. But if we find it, we tell him. We're trapped, and he takes it. They aren't a whole lot of glass, bottles, or plastic. If people throw them over, they'll float to the shore, and they'll get them. I'm glad there's no more Coke bottles and Pepsi bottles. People, on a weekend or something, they'll throw over. But very seldom anybody gets clutter. The bottom's in pretty good shape out there –

MS: Because the visibility –

PH: – that I know of.

MS: – is only about a quarter, two, or three.

PH: Well, see, that's in the summertime here that's because it's all mud here. It's mostly mud. It's not like Florida, a lot of cool rocks and sandy bottom. We're just like a ditch. You have your land all around it, and it's soft. It's not like back at the beach, the sand. That's why we're just

more muddy. Then you go to Florida, where it's all limestone and coral. It's going to be pretty blue and clear.

MB: Yes.

PH: But I'm sure if you get into bays, like here in South Carolina, that's all muddy down there too. It's even darker looking now there than it is here, as far as once you get on the inside. Yes, it's from the mud, the land.

MS: Have you ever found any kind of strange stuff that people throw over board?

PH: No.

MB: What were you thinking of?

MS: I don't know. It just seems to me you must cover a lot of ground back there. There's a lot of boats. There's all these houses and docks.

PH: No, other than –

MS: Because I scuba, I see stuff all the time. But that's in clear water.

PH: Yes. Really, the bay, you could jump over that water. We work and pretty much go anywhere. You only have a few (broke off pallens?) there from a garden. Bob had a gardener in the bay to broke off pallens under the water. You have to watch out for them. It might bite. It says dangerous, but –

MS: You said – it was when the tape was off – the Butters, they're pretty respectful.

PH: Oh, yes, yes. Even on the weekend, when everybody's out there, full of jet skis, they come up to us sometimes and just curious to see what we do. I'll throw them a clam or two if they want to try one. Give it to him. I don't charge him because you can't do that.

MB: Hardly any transaction out there.

PH: Yes. Oh, believe me, if the marine fishery was sitting on the hill –

MB: Oh, boy.

PH: – and sold you ten clams –

MB: He'd be out there and –

PH: – he'd come around and cause me my day's work. Yes.

MB: Damn, boy.



PH: [laughter] I'm serious.

MB: Well, I appreciate the interview. That was fantastic, the marine stuff and the story.

MS: Yes.

PH: But getting back to that, you can buy a license for it if you did want to sell to the buyer and stuff. That's why I get a \$50 license, \$100 license shrimping. I can sell to who I want to when I want to.

MB: Right.

PH: Yes.

MB: Well, let me ask you that real quick.

PH: It's all about the money.

MB: Right. Isn't it always?

PH: It's always about the money, yes.

MB: Show me the money.

PH: Show me the money. Money walks and [laughter] –

MB: [inaudible]

PH: – you got it.

MB: [laughter] Well, let me ask you this. Friday, I'd love to get some shots. But I would have to talk to Johnny Wayne about what he's doing Friday.

PH: Get him to run you at it. We'll be out there Friday morning by 9:00 a.m. We'll be out there clamming, yes, by 9:00 a.m.

MB: Well, we probably have to –

PH: We'll stay until probably 3:00 p.m. or 4:00 p.m.

MB: So, if you were to come back around noon, he usually gets back in around noon–

PH: (Roast him more?).

MB: I'm glad your wife brought that up. Because, in other words, when you had your heart

attack –

PH: Right.

MB: – the community responded.

PH: The community responded great. I mean, all the churches around gave me money. Everybody was praying for me while I was in the hospital. Prayer does work. I believe in that because I was given a second chance. I have my bills. They took up collections around, and my bills were paid for about three months. One to three months, honey?

Female Speaker: Two months.

PH: Two months. Two months to give me time to recover so I can go back to work to continue my bills. I didn't lose nothing. Kept everything. All the people –

FS: They have groceries they brought.

PH: Yes. People brought us groceries. All my buddies gave me \$100 apiece. It was real good.

MB: Well, let me –

PH: Everybody looked out for me. I didn't ever know I had so many friends until that happened, and my house was full of people coming over. Yes.

MB: That gave you a good feeling, doesn't it?

PH: It gave me a great feeling. So, Sneads Ferry is real good. The people around here do stick together. When somebody's down and needs anything, they help them. People pull together in crises.

MB: I think that's getting hard to find in –

PH: Yes, yes, especially all the fishermen. They all help out, yes.

MB: I mean, there is danger out there, as you were saying.

PH: Yes.

MB: But not only that, I guess it makes that kind of camaraderie or fellowship of going through what you go through all the time every day. Even Greensboro is a nice little city. But I mean, I lived in L.A. for fifteen years. That's where Andy lives.

PH: Yes.

MB: It doesn't mean there aren't good people in L.A. or anything.

PH: Yes.

MB: It just means that they don't know each other. There isn't that sense of community. There really isn't.

PH: Really?

MB: You can be lost in the city. No way to know –

PH: That's bad.

MB: Yes.

PH: Yes.

MB: You're doing whatever you can. Yes. I mean, that's a thing.

PH: Yes.

MB: It's a whole different thing. You can feel like nobody cares.

PH: Yes. I can't say that around here. Around here, a lot of people care. I mean, if somebody's down and out, there's always somebody– the churches will get together. They'll take up a collection if somebody's got to have an operation. I don't care who he is, red, yellow, black, or white. They get help. Somebody always starts it. Yes, thank God for all the churches.

FS: The good people.

PH: The good people, yes.

MB: Good.

PH: That's it.

MB: I'm glad we got that. Good.

[end of transcript]